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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002791

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AF FOR DAS YAMAMOTO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: MISSION INTERCEDES IN CASE OF ARRESTED
ETHIOPIAN BUSINESSMAN ALEMAYEHU FANTU

Classified By: Charge Vicki Huddleston for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: On October 12 poloff was approached by Dr. Nardos, the wife of CUD detainee Berhanu Nega, who indicated that prominent Ethiopian businessman Alemayehu Fantu was arrested on October 5, having been charged with attempting to incite violence. Suspecting maltreatment while he was in prison, she appealed to the Embassy to inquire into his wellbeing. PAO met with the Commissioner of Public Prisons to discuss the case and appealed to Mission contact Pastor Daniel Gebreselassie (closely protect) of the NGO Prison Fellowship to meet with the Police Commissioner to determine what the charges were against Alemayehu Fantu, and whether bail would be possible. The Police Commissioner indicated that after two weeks in which the public prosecutor would need to do his investigation, Alemayehu would be brought before the courts, and at that time be allowed to ask for bail. Pastor Daniel was personally assured by the head of Central Investigations that Alemayehu was not abused. End Summary.

EMBASSY ACTIONS ON FANTU'S BEHALF

12. (C) According to Dr. Nardos, wife of CUD detainee Berhanu Nega, who met with poloff on October 8, Alemayehu Fantu, son of the owner of a prominent chain of supermarkets in Addis Ababa, was arrested on October 5 on charges of attempting to incite violence. She appealed to the Embassy to ascertain his wellbeing, suspecting that he was being beaten while in prison. The PAO contacted the Commissioner for Public Prisons, and asked him to determine the whereabouts of Fantu as well as whether he was being beaten while in custody. The Commissioner promised to be cooperative on both counts, adding that he would be held liable if a prisoner in his care was maltreated. Pastor Daniel Gebreselassie, head of the NGO Prison Fellowship, was also asked by the PAO to intercede with the Police Commissioner, to determine whether bail was possible for Fantu, and to verify whether he was being tortured while incarcerated.

PASTOR DANIEL INTERCEDES

13. (C) Pastor Daniel, met with the Commissioner of Prisons and the Commissioner of Police to discuss Alemayehu's case. Pastor Daniel said he told them that there was the increasing

impression among the Addis Abba business community that the government was using frivolous charges to go after those they considered a threat. The Police Commissioner confirmed that Aleymayu had indeed been arrested for storing 5000 CUD civil disobedience calendars in his home. (Note: The calendars were issued by the CUD on the eve of the Ethiopian New Year, and called for a variety of civil disobedience measures aimed at disrupting government institutions and the economy. End note.). Pastor Daniel heard in his conversation with other local contacts that there might be other alleged motives leading to Alemayu's arrest, including jealousy by a business associate, who fingered him to the authorities. According to Pastor Daniel, the government was contemplating locking up Alemayu's father also, but had desisted at the last minute. Inquiring about Alemayu's health, Pastor Daniel was encouraged by the Police Commissioner to call the Head of Central Investigations in his presence. According to Pastor Daniel, the Head of Central Investigations told him that Fantu was not beaten as alleged and that if that had happened, he "would personally be in trouble." Fantu had a court appearance on October 12, and the Police Commissioner told Pastor Daniel that he would have another when the public prosecutor finished his investigation after a two week period, after which he would be again brought to court, at which time he could seek bail.

COMMENT

14. (C) High level prison and police authorities are now aware of the Embassy's interest in Alemayu's arrest, as well as that of Amnesty International. After Alemayu gets

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his day in court, the government may well release him on bail.
HUDDLESTON